Instinct, Phantasy, and Psychological Deep Structure—A Reinterpretation of Aspects of the Work of Melanie Klein

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If you are applying psychoanalytic treatment to children you should meet Melanie Klein ... She is saying some things that may or not be true, and you must find out for yourself for you will not get what Melanie Klein teaches in my analysis with you.

Communication by James Strachey to his analysand Donald Winnicott, (Winnicott, 1962, p. 173).

Introduction

ALTHOUGH A SIGNIFICANT PROPORTION OF the world's analysts are Kleinian analysts, a serious consideration of the work of Melanie Klein has not been a major part of the dialogue that constitutes American psychoanalytic thinking. Too often, when Klein's theory is considered, it is scrutinized only long enough to be dismissed on the basis of one "untenable" idea or another, such as Klein's conception of the death instinct, her developmental timetable, her theory of technique, and so on.

My intention is not to proselytize, for I am not a Kleinian and have profound disagreements with many aspects of her work; rather my aim is to present Klein's thinking in a light that might account for the important influence her ideas have had on the development of psychoanalytic thought outside of the United States. In particular, Klein has had a powerful influence on the development of British object relations theory; although this as

The Concept of Phantasy

In discussing Klein, one must begin with the concept of phantasy for this is the hub of the mind-body system envisioned by her. Phantasy for Klein (1952b) is the psychic representation of instinct. Instinct itself is a biological entity and so phantasy is the psychic representation of one's biology. Instinct must undergo some type of transformation in order to generate "mental corollaries" (Isaacs, 1952), i.e. phantasies. The functional unit of the mind that is responsible for this transformation is the id. Instincts, as part of one's biology, are present from birth and the id performs its transformational function from the beginning. The newborn infant's world at the outset is a bodily world, and phantasy represents the infant's attempts at transforming somatic events into a mental form. Even into adulthood, phantasy never loses its connection with the body. Phantasy content is always ultimately traceable to thoughts and feelings about the workings and contents of one's own body in relation to the workings and contents of the body of the other.
Klein's conception of instinct derives from Freud's (1905) definition of instinct as "the demand made [by the body] upon the mind for work" (p. 168). For Klein, the body's "demand" has information encoded in it that the mind (specifically, the id) as receiver transforms into psychic phenomena with specific contents.

A great part of that which makes up one's inherited constitution appears on a psychological plane through the operation of the instincts. Does this mean that the infant inherits thoughts, and thinks those thoughts from the beginning? This clearly would be an untenable psychological theory. Unfortunately, it is very often at this juncture that Kleinian theory is dismissed as absurd. Many analysts see little point in pursuing a theory that evolves from the assumptions that (1) the infant is born with ideas that do not evolve from experience, and (2) that the infant can think at birth in ways that Piaget has shown are not possible until much later in development. However, I feel that before discarding the whole system of Kleinian thought on these grounds, it is worthwhile listening carefully to the language of the Kleinians to see if such apparently untenable ideas make sense from any vantage point.

In her classic paper on phantasy, Isaacs (1952) writes,

It has sometimes been suggested that unconscious phantasies such as that of "tearing [the breast] to bits" would not arise in the child's mind before he had gained the conscious knowledge that tearing a person to bits would mean killing him or her. Such a view does not meet the case. It overlooks the fact that such knowledge is inherent in bodily impulses as a vehicle of instinct, in the aim of instinct, in the excitation of the organ, i.e. in this case, the mouth.

The phantasy that his passionate impulses will destroy the breast does not require the infant to have actually seen objects eaten up and destroyed, and then to have come to the conclusion that he could do it too. This aim, this relation to the object, is inherent in the character and direction of the impulse itself and in its related affects (pp. 93–94).

Isaacs is proposing here that the idea of tearing an object to bits is not learned, but is part and parcel of the aim of the instinct. Klein makes the same point when she attributes the infant's knowledge of the breast before it is encountered to "phylogenetic inheritance" (1952a, p. 117fn.). In this conception of instinct, the Kleinians have expanded the concept of aim from Freud's (1905), (1915) original usage where the aim of an instinct was the discharge of tension. Isaac's usage is not incompatible with Freud's but goes beyond his to state that the aim of the instinct in any given instance is characterized by a specific type of object relatedness that includes specific affective and ideational qualities that do not depend upon actual experience with objects.

**Psychological Deep Structure**

The question will arise, "If the infant is not born with thoughts, how does he come by this 'knowledge' of objects if not by experience?" The Kleinians do not offer an answer to the question beyond the notion of "phylogenetic inheritance" (Klein, 1952a), but I believe that an answer might be provided by means of an analogy with Chomsky's (1957), (1968) concept of linguistic deep structure. Infants are not born knowing French, English, Russian, or any other language, but given an ordinary environment and ordinary constitutional endowment, each infant learns one of the languages now spoken on this planet. It is simply not possible, according to Chomsky, for a human being to deduce and operationalize the grammatical structure of language without a pre-existing system with which to select from and organize the mass of sounds to which one is exposed. Chomsky refers to this system, this code, as the "deep structure" of language. The individual does not have to, nor could he, create a grammar, but at the same time, he is not born knowing how to speak a language. The individual is born with a code that is built into the mode of functioning of his perceptual, cognitive, and motor apparatuses that will determine that he will organize sensory data and render them linguistically meaningful in a highly specific way. In other words, the infant will organize auditory stimuli in a way that is determined by the code with which he has work.
The assumption underlying Chomsky's concept of deep structure is that human beings do not randomly organize experience. Nothing is perceived absolutely freshly, i.e. free of preconception, pre-existing schemata, pre-existing systems for organizing that which is perceived. Meaning cannot be generated absolutely de novo.

Very similar understandings of the processing of experience in terms of inherent structures have been developed by Jakobson and de Saussure in the field of linguistics, Levi-Strauss in the field of anthropology, and Piaget in the field of developmental psychology.

To begin with a basic example of an inherent system of organizing perception, the human perception of color is not simply a matter of passively receiving sensory data and converting the data into visual experience. The primary colors, perceived as discrete differentiated groupings, are the product of a pre-existing schema by which one organizes into groups certain portions of the continuous range of wavelengths of light (Bornstein, 1975). In other words, the groupings of wavelengths that we call colors are both arbitrary and universal among human beings and are the product of the way in which we organize the continuous spectrum of wavelengths, each wavelength differing from the next one by a fixed quantity of energy. We all divide the spectrum in precisely the same way (in the absence of color blindness) because of a pre-existing biological schema that we use to organize our perceptions.

Similarly, our organization of sounds into phonemes (the basic units of sound from which words are constructed) is not a matter of passive reception of an existing external order. The distinction between the phonemes "ba" and "pa, " for example, is not a quality of the stimuli themselves. Rather, it is built into our system of organizing stimuli. The human being is incapable of discerning any sound between these two phonemes (Eimas, 1975).

The shapes and shadings comprising the human face are preferentially discernible by the infant on the basis of constitutionally determined modes of organizing perception (Stern, 1983). Again, we organize visual data into groupings (in this instance shapes and shadings) that are not our own individual creations, but the product of a system for organizing perception that is shared by all human beings.

Inherited modes of organizing experience can be viewed as the counterpart of animal instincts. The chick has an inherited code with which to organize and respond to stimuli that precedes any actual experience. The chick, without prior experience of predatory danger, will scurry for cover upon sighting the wing pattern of a predator (Lorenz, 1937); (Tinbergen, 1957).

From the perspective of the concept of inherited codes, or templates, by which actual experience is organized, the Kleinian concept of inborn "knowledge ... inherent in bodily impulses" (Isaacs, 1952, p. 94) can be understood not as inherited thoughts, but as a biological code that is an integral part of instinct. The infant is not born with the knowledge of, or phantasy about, tearing at the breast; rather, the infant might be thought of as born with a powerful predisposition to organize and to make sense of experience along specific lines. Whether those predetermined lines are the ones proposed by Klein is still very much an open question. However, the conceptualization of instincts as psychological deep structures that I have presented seems to me to be a necessary addition to psychoanalytic instinct theory (Grotstein, 1984); (Ogden, 1984a). (See Samuels, 1983, for an application of a similar conception of "inheritance of knowledge" to the understanding of Jung's concept of archetypes.)

The Preconception and the Realization

In the beginning, phantasy is the infant's interpretation of experience. (I will defer until later a discussion of the form of symbolization and the degree of subjectivity that Klein attributes to the infant's experience at the beginning of development.) Which

phantasies are more compelling than others for the infant at a given moment is determined by the interplay of the infant's constitutional make up and actual experience. For Klein, the emphasis is clearly on the former: "the strength of the ego—reflecting the state of fusion between the two instincts—is, I believe, constitutionally determined" (Klein, 1958, pp. 238–239).
Using the paradigm of codes analogous to the deep structure of language, I would restate Klein's ideas in the following way: the relative constitutional endowment of life and death instincts, has the major role in determining which code the infant will predominantly rely upon to interpret experience. Experience interpreted in accord with the death instinct will be attributed aggressive and dangerous meanings, while experience organized in terms of the life instinct will be understood in terms of nurturing, loving meanings.

The role of actual experience with the mother is important, but secondary: To what extent the strength of the ego can be maintained and increased is in part affected by external factors, in particular, the mother's attitude towards the infant. However, even when the life instinct and the capacity for love predominate, destructive impulses are still deflected outwards and contribute to the creation of persecutory and dangerous objects which are re-introjected.

Actual experience may support an instinctual mode of organizing experience, but does not create the mode by which the experience is interpreted. For instance, persistent deprivation will lend emotional intensity to interpretations made in accord with the death instinct. Actual deprivation will confirm the infant's readiness to experience his object as dangerous. The sense of danger is not created by the deprivation; real danger simply confirms the infant's anticipation that such danger exists. Moreover, such anticipation of danger will not be entirely disconfirmed by the absence of actual danger. Interpreting experience along the lines of meaning that follow from the code connected with the death instinct will go on despite good experience: "Even the child who has a loving relation with his mother has also unconsciously a terror of being devoured, torn up, and destroyed by her" (Klein, 1963, p. 277).

In Kleinian theory the instincts are conceived of as biologically determined organizations that utilize actual experience to link a "preconception" with its "realization" (Bion, 1962b), e.g. the linking of the preconception of danger with a facet of reality that can be experienced as dangerous. The preconception is not an idea, but a potential for an idea. It is only in the linking of the preconception with the real that a conception (a thought) is generated.

**Freud's Conception of "Inheritance of Knowledge"**

I consider this understanding of the Kleinian concept of phylogenetically inherited "knowledge" (what Bion, 1962a terms "preconception") to be an outgrowth of the second (chronologically) of Freud's two most fundamental contributions to psychology. The first of these contributions is his conception of the unconscious mind, the notion that one has thoughts, feelings, motivations, etc. of which one is unaware, but which nonetheless have a powerful role in determining the nature of one's observable thoughts, feelings, and behavior. The second of Freud's two monumental contributions was his theory of sexual meanings. I believe that the significance of this second cornerstone of psychoanalytic theory has been, to a considerable degree, lost sight of in recent years. Freud was so bold as to claim not simply that sexual desire is a terribly powerful human motivation and that this is so from birth onward (not only from puberty onward). (This much of Freud's sexual theory is generally understood and appreciated, but I do not believe that this is the major significance of Freud's sexual theory). Far more radical a proposal even than this was Freud's notion that all human psychopathology, all human cultural achievements, all human behavior, can be understood in terms of sexual meanings. From this perspective, the sexual instinct is not simply a striving, an impulse, a desire, but the vehicle (not a vehicle) by which human beings create meaning. In other words, Freud did not simply propose that the sexual instinct be thought of as generating sexual wishes and impulses. Of much wider significance is the implication that human beings interpret all perceptions in terms of sexual meanings, thereby creating experience. One makes sense of one's internal and external perceptions through the lens of the system of sexual meanings. To use still another metaphor, the sexual instinct is the Rosetta stone which allows the human being to translate raw
sensory data into meaning-laden experience (cf. Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983, for a discussion of this idea from a different vantage point).

Freud's theory of psychological development is built upon a notion of an inborn expectantcy of particular constellations of meanings (including dangers specific to each phase of development) which expectancy does not depend on actual experience. The universality of castration anxiety, for example, is not simply the product of environmental factors; rather, experience serves as a trigger for an inborn expectation of a specific form of bodily damage. Further, the Oedipus complex as a whole is understood by Freud as a universal mode of organizing and responding to experience, and not simply as a feature of the family environment to which the child responds. Here again one is confronted by Freud's boldness: he

4 At times Freud placed greater importance on inborn, phylogenetically determined schemata than on actual experience is unmistakable: "Whenever experiences fail to fit in with hereditary schema, they become remodelled in the imagination" (Freud, 1918 pp. 119).

- 507 -

dared to suggest not only that all human experience can be understood in terms of sexual meanings; more than that, he proposed that the paradigm of the Oedipus complex is a major principle by which these meanings (ultimately sexual in nature) are organized. One can scarcely imagine the enormity of the challenge Freud posed for himself in attempting to discern a single system by which all human meaning is created, a single lens through which all raw sensory data is filtered, organized, and attributed meaning. And yet this is the puzzle for which Freud's theory of sexuality and the Oedipus complex is the proposed solution.

For Freud, phylogenetic inheritance is the basis for the capacity of instinct to give rise to universal constellations of sexual meanings:

Whence comes the need for these [universal sexual] phantasies and the material for them? There can be no doubt that their sources lie in the instincts; but it has still to be explained why the same phantasies with the same content are created on every occasion. I am prepared with an answer which I know will seem daring to you. I believe these primal phantasies, as I should like to call them, and no doubt a few others as well, are a phylogenetic endowment. In them, the individual reaches beyond his own experience into primaeval experience at points where his own experience has been too rudimentary. It seems to me quite possible that all the things that are told us today in analysis as phantasy—the seduction of children, the inflaming of sexual excitement by observing parental intercourse, the threat of castration (or rather castration itself)—were once real occurrences in the primaeval times of the human family, and that children in their phantasies are simply filling in the gaps in individual truth with prehistoric truth. I have repeatedly been led to suspect that the psychology of the neuroses has stored up in it more of the antiquities of human development than any other source (Freud, 1916–17, pp. 370–371).

From this perspective, Klein has not introduced a radical departure from Freud's conceptualization of "inheritance" of knowledge; rather, she has expanded his notion of inherent readiness to organize experience in specific ways and has extended it to pre-Oedipal experience. In particular, she focused on the forms of preconception characterizing oral, anal and early phallic levels of development. When Isaacs (1952) proposed that the infant's knowledge of the breast and his wish to tear it to bits be understood as inherent in the instincts, she was elaborating and extending to early phases of instinctual development, principles that are at the core of Freud's revolutionary contribution to psychology: the potential

- 508 -
of instinct to serve as the Rosetta stone for man's attribution of meaning to experience.

For Klein, actual experience which varies considerably in different families, cultures, eras, etc. serves to provide data to be organized in a highly pre-determined way by the code inherent in the instincts. Using the analogy of the deep structure of language, a very wide range of phonemic data (the sound of actual spoken language) will provide sufficient "stimuli" for the processes involved in the infant's methods of perceiving and organizing the sound units of language into a system that constitutes the syntactic and semantic structure of a given language. Interaction with parenting figures, including exposure to spoken language, is essential, but not as a
source of specific information about a method of constructing a grammar. Rather, actual experience triggers a sequence of inborn functions by which perceived speech sounds are organized in a given way.

In terms of the ethological analogy introduced earlier, the mother hen does not teach her chicks the details of the wing patterns of predators, nor does she teach them by example the adaptive fight and flight responses to the recognition of the predator. Instead, the mothering activities of the hen safeguard the chick's unfolding biologically determined maturational processes which include complex, highly differentiated instinctual response patterns that include the readiness to organize experience in a way so as to lead to a very specific differentiation of the predator and non-predator, and highly specific responses to each.

Bowlby's (1969) understanding of inborn attachment and separation behavior patterns is related, although not identical, to the conception of psychological deep structure that I have outlined. Bowlby's focus is not on the psychological organization of meanings along particular lines, so much as it is on the interplay of the environment and innate behavioral systems:

Attachment behaviour ... is held to have a biological function specific to itself ... Attachment behaviour is regarded as what occurs when certain behavioural systems are activated. The behavioural systems themselves are believed to develop within the infant as a result of his interaction with his environment of evolutionary adaptedness, and especially of his interaction with the principal figure in the environment, namely his mother (pp. 179–180).

Bowlby's theory bears some similarity to the notion of psychological deep structure in that it focuses upon the unlearned,

"supra-individual" elements in attachment and separation behaviour. However, it differs from the psychoanalytic deep structure conception that I have described in that his theory deals with patterns of behavior as opposed to systems of generating and organizing meaning.

**The Symbolic Form of Early Phantasy Activity**

Thus far two aspects of the development of early mental life have been put aside in order to focus on the process by which "phylogenetic inheritance of knowledge" might occur. Attention will now be focused on the way in which early mental contents (primitive phantasies) are experienced by the infant. We are now asking: What, according to Klein, is the form of symbolization utilized by the infant (e.g. words, visual images, bodily sensations) and what is the degree of subjectivity of which he is capable?

I would like to address first the Kleinian notion of the form, as opposed to the mode, of symbolization involved in early phantasy activity. (The mode of symbolization involved in the paranoideal-schizoid position, i.e. symbolic equation, will be discussed later.) One cannot help but become skeptical about Kleinian early developmental theory if one understands the theory as proposing a picture of the infant as engaged in symbolic mental activity comparable to adult phantasy, differing only in the degree of primitivity of the contents. One frequently hears it said that the Kleinians imagine that the infant is capable of phantasy long before his symbolic (particularly verbal) capacities could possibly have developed to the point required for such activity. Such criticism is based on an incomplete understanding of the Kleinian conception of phantasy. The Kleinians do not limit the concept of phantasy to phantasies in the form of visual and verbal symbols: "At first, the whole weight of wish and phantasy is borne by sensation and affect" (Isaacs, 1952, p. 92).

If one is to understand Kleinian theory of early phantasy activity, one must always keep in mind that the Kleinians' written descriptions of early phantasies are necessarily in verbal terms, and therefore, are only indirectly related to the actual pre-verbal infantile phantasy being referred to. The infant does not think in verbal terms:

The adult way of regarding the body and the mind as two separate sorts of experience can certainly not hold true of the infant's world. It is easier for adults to observe actual sucking than to remember or understand what

the experience of sucking is to the infant, for whom there is no dichotomy of body and mind, but a single, undifferentiated experience of sucking and phantasying. Even those aspects of psychological experience which
we later on distinguish as "sensation", "feeling", etc., cannot in the early days be distinguished and separated. Sensations, feelings, as such, emerge through development from the primary whole of experience, which is that of sucking—sensing—feeling—phantasying. This total experience becomes gradually differentiated into its various aspects of experience: bodily movements, sensations, imaginings, knowings, and so on (W. C. M. Scott, 1943), (quoted by Isaacs, 1952, pp. 92–93fn.).

To begin to get a sense of the infant's phantasy experience, one must attempt the impossible in attempting to imagine oneself out of the system of verbal symbols in which we as adults live and are trapped, and instead, to imagine oneself into a system of non-verbal, sensory experience (including kinaesthetic and visceral experience). This act of imagination involves, in part, an attempt to think without words. Despite the extreme difficulty we have in imagining ourselves into the psychological state of the infant, there is nothing mystical about the idea of infantile phantasy. the discontinuity between the adult state and the infantile state can be understood to derive in part from the difference in form and mode of symbolic activity employed by infants as compared to children and adults. The fact that infantile phantasy is not directly observable poses no greater theoretical problem than the concept of the unconscious mind itself which is by definition unobservable. As with the unconscious, all that is observable about infantile phantasy are its derivatives.

The Degree of Subjectivity and Mode of Symbolization in Early Phantasy Activity

In developing a sense of the nature of the Kleinian conception of early phantasy activity, we must at this point inquire into the way in which the Kleinians conceive of the place of the subject in relation to his signs and symbols in the process of re-presenting bodily experience in phantasy. In other words, one must attempt to understand how Klein conceived of the way in which the infant experiences himself in relation to his thoughts and sensations.

Klein is not explicit about the way in which she views the infant's experience of his early part-object relationships. The following is representative of the way in which she discusses the infant's feelings in relation to idealized and persecutory internal objects:

It is characteristic of the emotions of the very young infant that they are of an extreme and powerful nature. The frustrating (bad) object is felt to be a terrifying persecutor, the good breast tends to turn into the "ideal" breast which should fulfill the greedy desire for unlimited, immediate, and everlasting gratification. Thus, feelings arise about a perfect and inexhaustible breast, always available, always gratifying. Another factor which makes for idealization of the good breast is the strength of the infant's persecutory fear, which creates the need to be protected from persecutors and therefore goes to increase the power of an all-gratifying object. The idealized breast forms the corollary of the persecuting breast; and in so far as idealization is derived from the need to be protected from persecuting objects, it is a method of defence against anxiety (1952a, p. 64).

From this account and many others like it (see for example, Klein, 1930), Klein leaves a fundamental question unaddressed: Is there a subjective self feeling frightened of bad objects and feeling protected by good ones; or is it simply a fact (experienced by no one in particular) that there is danger posed by bad objects, and a fact that there is a need for protection by good objects. In the latter case, (where things just happen), no subjectivity is involved; rather, there is simply registration of sensation with an absence of a feeling of "I-ness," an absence of a sense of oneself as observer and creator of one's thoughts, feelings and perceptions. The language that Klein uses here is characteristic of her discussion of infantile phantasy in that she relies heavily on the passive voice to describe infantile experience: "the bad object is felt to be ....," "the good breast tends to turn into ....", "feelings arise ....", fears "create the need" for protection, the idealized object "is derived from the need to be protected." Only indirectly through this use of language is there indication that Klein conceives of early infantile experience as non-subjective (that is, devoid of a sense of "I-ness").

The subsequent work of Kleinians (Bick [1968], Bion, [1962a], Meltzer [1975], Segal [1957], Tustin [1972], and others) has to a large degree moved in the direction of a conception of early infantile experience as devoid of subjectivity. The infant's thoughts, feelings and perceptions are conceived of by these followers of Klein as constituting things in themselves, events that simply occur. The infant does not experience himself as having a point of view or perspective. There is no infant as thinker or interpreter of his experience. From an outsider's point of
in the earliest phase of development. The self that does exist is the self as object, not the self as subject. The self as subject might be thought of as the "I" in the sentence: "I am being attacked." There is no "I" as thinker in the beginning (the paranoid-schizoid position), only the state of "being attack." The infant reacts to internal and external stimuli with a high degree of automaticity. Experience for the infant has the distinct mark of inevitability; it could not possibly be other than what it is. Adults in situations of sudden, extreme danger experience a greatly diminished sense of subjectivity. One simply reacts in a way that feels automatic and impersonal. Only afterward are the possible meanings of the event considered. Early infantile experience might be thought of as having the same automatic, impersonal quality, but without the subsequent interpretive activity. One can get a rather clear picture of extended periods of this non-subjective, automatically reactive state of mind from paranoid patients when they are in a state of fearfulness bordering on panic, or from manic-depressive patients in a manic episode.

We see a similar, but less intense psychological state in the borderline patient who, when under stress, frequently operates in this "realm of the thing in itself."

When the therapist of a thirty-year old woman began to inquire about the meaning of a very expensive Christmas gift that she had presented to the therapist, the patient was both enraged and "deeply hurt" because the event "proved" something once and for all that the patient had known for some time. She now knew for certain that the therapist despised her and wanted only to humiliate her the moment she opened herself up to him. For this patient there was no other possible interpretation of what had occurred. The event spoke for itself. The therapist's attempts to help the patient understand why she felt as she did were viewed as manipulations designed to cover up the facts. The Christmas gift spoke for itself and the patient saw no reason to make it into anything different from what it was, i.e. a Christmas gift.

The mode of symbolization involved in this kind of thinking has been termed "symbolic equation" (Segal, 1957). The symbol (a thought or symbolic act) and the symbolized (that which is being thought about or represented in action) are treated as absolutely equivalent. There is no interpreter mediating between the two. The gift is what it is. It is not a symbolic act with a meaning given to it by the patient as creator and interpreter of her symbols. Similarly, the infant's phantasy is not experienced as a personal creation;

it is an event, a fact, the consequences of which must be attended to.

The Infant's Mental Capacities

At this point, the question again arises as to whether the Kleinians "really believe" that such complicated mental activity as that involved in the phantasy of tearing the breast to bits goes on in the first weeks and months of life. Even taking into consideration the idea that infantile phantasies as conceived by Klein are (1) not verbally symbolized, (2) do not presuppose the development of the symbolic function farther than the state of non-verbal symbolic equation and (3) involve little, if any, subjectivity, important questions remain. "How can the Kleinians assume the presence of rather advanced cognitive capacities in the first weeks of life? For example, how can the Kleinians assume that the capacity to differentiate outside and inside, the capacity to represent the mother in her absence, the capacity to differentiate self from non-self, the capacity to differentiate the mother from other people, etc., all exist in the first weeks of life, when Piaget has demonstrated that these capacities are not achieved until significantly later in development?"

I believe that Klein and her early circle (including Isaacs, Riviere, Heimann, and Rosenfeld) did not have the data available to them that are required to reply to these questions. Isaacs (1952) invoked the concept of the continuity of development saying that just as children understand language considerably before they can speak, we must assume that phantasy activity does not arise de novo without considerable development prior to the appearance of clear evidence of phantasy in verbal productions and play activity.

I believe that a fuller consideration of the question of the timing of the development of mental capacities underlying phantasy activity can now be made on the basis of the principles of development of early mental
functioning emerging from the neo-natal observational research of Bower (1977), Brazelton (1981), Eimas (1975), Sander (1975), Stern (1977), Trevarthan (1979), and others. First, these data suggest that cognitive capacities do not develop solely along a unitary chronological sequence of differentiating and integrating structures. Few would question the existence of the developmental sequence so elegantly demonstrated by Piaget (1936). However, what is being added to Piaget's understanding of cognitive development is the notion of the operation of capacities much earlier than expected in specific contexts where the operation of such capacities is necessary for the infant's participation in a life-sustaining early form of relatedness to the mother, i.e. the mother-infant dialogue of the first days and weeks of life (cf. Grotstein, 1983; Stern, 1983).

Stern (1977) describes the infant's "innate predilection" for specific visual configurations making up the human face. The infant's capacity for shape and shading discriminations allows him to discern and select such configurations "without any previous specific learning experiences" (Stern, 1977, p. 36).

[The infant's] special interest [in the human face] is founded on a biological basis by virtue of the infant's innate bias for certain kinds and amounts of stimulation ... the sharp angles provided by the corners of the eyes as well as the light-dark contrast of pupil and eye white (sclera) and of eyebrow and skin are especially fascinating to the infant. From the beginning, then, the infant is "designed" to find the human face fascinating ... (Stern, 1977 p. 37).

The infant very early on is able to differentiate the mother's face from other faces (Brazelton, 1981). The shape and shading discriminations involved in this cognitive task and the capacity for recall of these discriminations are not stabilized, nor are they generalized to other contexts, and will not become a stable part of the observable, differentiated cognitive capacities demonstrable in Piagetian test situations until much later in development. (Piaget's [1954] stage of object permanence wherein the infant achieves the capacity to maintain a mental representation of an inanimate object in its absence does not occur until the last quarter of the first year of life.)

Using this model of cognitive capacities developing along more than one timetable and depending heavily on the specific emotional and interpersonal context, one could entertain the possibility that the mental activity involved in the Kleinian conception of infantile phantasy may involve the more unstable and more context-limited cognitive operations that are out of synchrony with the timetable of the development of the stable cognitive structures described by Piaget.

A second relevant trend emerging from the neo-natal observational research of the last three decades is the idea that the infant from early on may utilize more than one form of knowledge about objects: one form of knowledge seems to develop in a sequence of steps (each cognitive development building upon previous ones in a fashion that allows for increasingly complex mental operations); the other form of knowledge seems to be more intuitive in the sense of not depending on a step-wise series of advances in mental functioning. For example, Bower (1971) has demonstrated that in the first weeks of life, infants have a sense of the continuity of the existence of the object over time and space. In one set of experiments, twenty-day-old infants evidenced surprise when an object failed to reappear after a screen was removed that had been placed between the infant and the object. In another set of experiments, when the eight-week-old infant's view of a portion of the path of a moving object was occluded by a screen, the infant's eye and head movements anticipated the reappearance of the object at the other side of the screen before the object actually became visible in its new location.

It seems that even very young infants know that an object is there even after it has been hidden ... The early age of the infant and the novelty of the test situation make it unlikely that such a response has been learned (Bower, 1971, p. 35).

This early sense of continuity of matter over time and space could be thought of as an important part of the infant's "intuitive" sense of objects from birth. The consolidation of the sense of object permanence at eight to ten months and at eighteen to twenty-two months reflect much more complex, more highly structured, and more stable
cognitive achievements. And yet, this early anticipation of the absent object must be taken into account in assessing Klein's conception of the infant as capable of recalling the mother in her absence in the first weeks of life.

This early intuition about the nature of objects could be thought of as a reflection of the operation of psychological deep structures, inborn modes of organizing perception. To acknowledge that there are inborn modes of organizing experience is not to say that one has established that the infant is capable of the complexity of mental activity that Klein envisions or that the content of that mental activity is of the sort hypothesized by Klein.

The Role of the Environment

With this understanding of the Kleinian conception of instinct, phantasy, and preconception in mind, we can now consider Klein's idea about the infant's relationship to the environment. For Klein (1952a), (1957), (1958), the infant is at first a prisoner of his own state of mind which he does not experience as a state of mind. In the very beginning, the infant sees in the external world only what he expects to see on the basis of his preconceptions (his organization of perception formed on the basis of his inherited modes of organizing experience). These expectations are of two general types reflecting the deep structures corresponding to the life and death instincts. For Klein, the death instinct generates more anxiety than does the life instinct and therefore initially exerts a far more powerful influence on the way the infant organizes his experience. For Klein (1952b), the death instinct generates a sense of danger that is given specific shape as the infant organizes his perceptions (both internal bodily sensation and the perception of external objects) in accord with the mode of attribution of meaning inherent in that instinct. A second system of meaning is generated by the infant's organization of perception in accord with the life instinct. The upshot of the infant's imprisonment in his expectations is that he is unable to learn from experience because new experience is interpreted only in terms of his expectations. An analogous situation exists in the profoundly paranoid adult patient who experiences all new relationships in terms of his expectations of danger. Someone who is genuinely kind to the intensely paranoid patient is seen by the patient as fraudulent and attempting to manipulate the patient into a position of vulnerability. Similarly, the hypochondriacal patient experiences all bodily sensations in accord with his delusional sense of internal danger. Normal findings on physical and laboratory examinations are not the least bit reassuring since these data are attributed meaning and denied meaning in accord with a self-fulfilling paranoid system.

To summarize, the infant, for Klein initially creates his reality: "The child's earliest reality is wholly phantastic" (Klein, 1930 p. 238). In part this can be understood as a projection of the infant's internal world onto his external objects (Grotstein, 1980). But even more basic than the notion of projection is the idea that the infant is incapable of doing anything but attributing meaning to experience on the basis of his inborn codes, the life and death instincts.

The question will now arise as to how the infant ever breaks out of the imprisonment of his preconceptions. How does the infant as conceived of by Klein ever become capable of learning from experience? One form of answer given by Kleinians to this question is that in combination with the biological maturation of the infant, good experience softens the infant's conviction about the dangers in the world:

When there is a predominance of good experience over bad experience, the ego acquires a belief in the prevalence of the ideal object over the persecutory objects and also of the predominance of its own life instinct over its own death instinct (Segal, 1964, p. 37).

However, this is not an entirely satisfying answer since one wonders why the infant should trust good experience instead of dismissing it as a trick or deception.

The relative constitutional endowment of life and death instinct also figures largely in Kleinian thinking about the infant's capacity to emerge from this initially closed intrapsychic system. It is argued that if constitutional endowment of the life instinct predominates over that of the death instinct, the projection of derivatives of the life instinct onto objects will allow for the creation of idealized good objects that serve to defend the ego against the persecutory objects. But this explanation does not account for the capacity of the infant to alter his relationship to
bad objects other than by continually relying on idealized good objects to protect him against the danger. By analogy, the adult paranoid patients does not emerge from paranoia by developing a mental police force to protect him against danger. A change in the quality of the infant's experience of the bad object is not accounted for by a conception of a quantitative shift in the balance of power between good and bad objects.

Although I do not find either of the above Kleinian explanations sufficient to account for the infant's acquisition of the capacity to learn from experience, I believe that implicit in one of Klein's concepts is an important contribution to a more penetrating understanding of this question. The concept I am referring to is that of projective identification. I feel that this concept provides a way of understanding the means by which the infant is able to find an exit from the closed system of his internal psychological world. The infant having superimposed his internal world on the external one, is imprisoned until the mother allows herself to be used in a process by which an entity is created that is neither infant nor mother, but a product of the two. Although Klein only implicitly

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3 In her two principal discussions of projective identification, Klein (1946), (1955) predominantly treated projective identification as an intrapsychic process utilized as a means of defending against anxiety generated by the death instinct. However, her examples and her use of language imply an interpersonal component of the process. She emphasizes that in projective identification, unconscious contents are projected "into" (1946, p. 8), not onto the object. Bion (1962a) went on to fully develop the idea of projective identification as a relationship of container and contained that serves not only as a defense, but as a form of communication in which two personality systems modify one another.

5 The necessity for conceptualizing a process by which there is movement from a closed psychological system to an open one is not unique to the Kleinian theory of development. For Freud (1914), the infant must move from an intrapsychic state of "absolute narcissism" (p. 130) to a later stage of object relatedness and secondary narcissism. As with Klein, Freud never described the process by which the infant escapes his initially closed psychological system in which all psychological investment is in the self, other than to say that instinctual frustration forces reality upon the infant and leads to the development of the reality principle. The impetus for the development of an open psychological system is accounted for in this way, but the psychological and interpersonal processes that mediate this change remain unspecified.

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Projective identification, as I understand it, allows the infant (more accurately, the mother-infant) to process experience in a way that differs qualitatively from anything that had been possible for the infant on his own. In projective identification, the projector induces a feeling state in another that corresponds to a state that the projector had been unable to experience for himself. The object is enlisted in playing a role in an externalized version of the projector's unconscious psychological state. When a "recipient" of a projective identification allows the induced state to reside within him without immediately attempting to rid himself of these feelings, a potential is created for the projector-recipient pair to experience that which had been projected in a manner that the projector alone had not been capable of.

Projective identification is not simply a process wherein the mother (as object of a projective identification) "metabolizes" experience for the infant (projector) and then returns it to him in a different form that he can then utilize. Although this is a common conception of projective identification, the shortcoming of this understanding

- 519 -
alone could engage in independently of the projector. Bion's (1962a) concept of the container and the contained more accurately represents the situation as I understand it. Containment not only involves an alteration of that which has been projected, it involves an alteration of the projector in the process of creating the type of emotional linkage that is involved in projective identification.

I believe that Winnicott's work on primary maternal preoccupation (1955), the stage of illusion (1951), and potential space (1950), (1971), can be understood as a development of the notion of projective identification as a form of simultaneous oneness and twoness (unity and separateness of mother and infant) that creates a potential for a form of experience that is more generative than the sum of the individual psychological states contributing to it. (For a discussion of the concept of potential space in the early mother-infant relationship, see Ogden, 1984b), (1984c).

With this understanding of projective identification in mind, it could be said that Kleinian thinking has an implicit conception of the importance of the environment, although Klein herself may not have fully recognized this implication of the concept of projective identification. Without the mother's serving as container for the infant's projective identifications, the infant would be doomed to an autistic or psychotic existence. Bion (1959), (1962a) refers to the mother's inability or unwillingness to accept the infant's projective identification as an "attack on linkage" which is then internalized by the infant in the form of his own attacks on his efforts to link thoughts in the process of thinking and to generate emotional ties (linkages) to other people. This, according to Bion (1959), is an essential factor in the etiology of schizophrenia and other severe emotional disturbances.

From the point of view of the understanding of projective identification that I have outlined, the conception of early development proposed by Klein need not undervalue the environment, the real mother, since the mother is absolutely central in serving as a partner in the shared psychological process constituting projective identification. The conception of the mother-infant of projective identification as the basic psychological unit of earliest development provides what I feel is a far more satisfactory explanation than those explicitly offered by Klein for the infant's capacity to develop beyond the confines of his inherited system of preconceptions.

Concluding Comments

Melanie Klein has enriched psychoanalytic theory through her pioneering attempts to delineate the nature of very early mental activity. The intense and often heated debate over Kleinian developmental theory has centered almost exclusively on (1) the dating of the appearance of mental activity, i.e. phantasy, (2) the degree of specificity of early phantasy activity, (3) the predominantly aggressive and persecutory content attributed to these phantasies, and (4) the divergence of such a conception from a Piagetian conception of the formation of cognitive capacities.

The circumscribed focus of this debate has obscured a number of important features of the Kleinian contribution. First, in any developmental theory, the proposed sequence and interrelationship of developmental phases is of far greater significance than the precision of the dating of the events. One does Kleinian theory a disservice by dismissing it on the basis of an implausible chronology before considering the possible value of the revised conception.

7 I fully concur with Winnicott's (1954) comments distinguishing the timetable from specific conceptual contents within Klein's developmental theory: "If I find an analyst claiming too much for the depressive position in the development that belongs to the first six months of life, I feel inclined to make the comment: what a pity to spoil a valuable concept by making it difficult to believe in" (p. 163).

Secondly, there is a tendency in discussing Klein to view her ideas as pronouncements to be accepted or rejected, as opposed to hypotheses to be modified in accord with subsequent theoretical advances and new clinical and observational data.
I feel that when Kleinian theory is taken as a set of hypotheses to be modified, extended, in part discarded, etc., one generates a frame of mind in which it becomes possible to build upon what is implicit in the theory (even when Kleinians themselves seem unaware of a particular potential of their ideas). For example, as has been discussed, I believe that the Kleinian notion that knowledge of objects is inherent in the aim of the instinct lends itself to being developed into a conception of psychological deep structure that is analogous to Chomsky's notion of linguistic deep structure. This seems to me to be a necessary component of any psychoanalytic developmental theory and does not simply represent an effort to make plausible a Kleinian conception of phylogenetic inheritance. In addition, the idea of projective identification has been developed by Bion and others into a concept that bridges the intrapsychic and the interpersonal despite the fact that Klein herself only minimally developed this aspect of her thinking.

Thirdly, I feel that focusing on the more apparent difficulties in Kleinian theory (e.g. the early developmental timetable), obscures other significant limitations of Kleinian thinking. For example, I believe that one of the most limiting features of Klein's developmental theory is her conception of the infant as an independent psychological entity capable of wishes and defenses that are projected onto and into objects that constitute independent psychological systems. The important point is not only that Klein undervalued the role of the environment; she seems to have had little conception of the mother-infant as the basic psychological unit undergoing development in the beginning. Paradoxically, I feel that Klein's concept of projective identification can be utilized as the basis for a conception of the creation of the mother-infant psychological unit as Bion has done in his conception of the container and the contained and as Winnicott has done in his conception of an early stage of illusion and in his concept of potential space.

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1 It is beyond the scope of the present paper to explore in any detail the Kleinian conception of the life and death instincts. Very schematically, the psychological correlates of the life instinct include the loving, sexual, nurturing, attachment-seeking, and generative motivations, while the psychological correlates of the death instinct include destructive, disintegrative, envious, and hostile motivations. In the beginning, the infant experiences a sense of diffuse, internal danger deriving from the death instinct. This sense of “nameless dread.”

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(Bion, 1962a), when defended against by means of splitting and projective identification, results in the establishment of a persecutory object world split off from one's good objects. The nature of the mental activity involved in this early stage of psychological organization (the paranoid-schizoid position) has been discussed in separate contributions (Ogden, 1982), (1983).

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